

Dragonshards

The Role of Dragons

By Keith Baker



In the Age of Demons, the couatls and the dragons joined forces to defeat the fiends of Khyber. The couatls sacrificed themselves to end this conflict, trapping the immortal demons beneath the world and leaving the dragons to rule supreme. The dragons are the last children of this first age and are the oldest civilization on Eberron. Their knowledge and power is beyond mortal measure. Few people ever encounter a dragon -- knowingly, at least. Most of the dragons have withdrawn to the continent of Argonnessen to study the Prophecy, sleep, and scheme. However, they remain aware of the world around them by relying on spies and spells to keep abreast of events on their home continent as well as the continents of Khorvaire, Sarlona, Aerenal, and Xen'drik. A handful of dragons do travel abroad, but they are usually disguised or well hidden.

The dragons of Argonnessen are a nation, not random monsters hoarding treasure and waiting for gold-hungry adventurers to seek them out. Given the dragons' secretive and reclusive nature, finding ways to introduce them into your game can be a challenge. The name of the game is ***Dungeons & Dragons***, so players may come to expect the occasional dragon encounter! This article examines a few ways in which player characters may deal with dragons in Eberron.

The Chamber

The dragons of the Chamber take an active role in the world. An adventurer in Sharn could rub shoulders with a silver dragon in a tavern -- but most likely, she would never know about this brush with draconic majesty. The Chamber is a subtle organization, and it prefers to pull strings and act through cat's-paws. The precise operations of the Chamber will be examined in more detail in a future Dragonshards article. But for now, the important thing is that while the Chamber is one of the simplest ways for heroes to cross paths with a dragon, they may never know the true nature of the encounter -- and thus, the desire to finally encounter a dragon will remain unfulfilled.

Ancient Guardians

The dragons battled the children of Khyber in the first age of the world. At the end of that battle, the greatest of the fiends were imprisoned using powerful magic. But no prison is foolproof, so the couatls and dragons placed guardians around these prisons to prevent others from knowingly or unknowingly releasing them. Unlike the demonic outsiders, dragons are not immortal, but over the millennia generations of dragons have continued to carry out the duties of their forebears. This could serve as one way for a party of adventurers to encounter a dragon in the wilds: a dragon in an ancient ruin, brooding over an ancient battleground and taking comfort in a vast hoard of rakshasa relics. Such a dragon may offer a warning to adventurers, but then again, it may not. The influence of a trapped demon or rakshasa rajah sometimes reaches beyond its prison, and many guardians become corrupted by their service; even though they continue to maintain their vigils, these sentinels become darker and more aggressive toward outsiders.

By their nature, guardian dragons cannot leave the regions that they are protecting. They rarely call attention to their presence or threaten the local populace. However, there are exceptions to every rule.

A number of guardian dragons have been mentioned in the ***Eberron Campaign Setting***. The most obvious is Rhashaak, who watches the city of Haka'torvhak in Q'barra. The local lizardfolk have come to view dragon guardians as gods, and Rhashaak has embraced this. As a result, he does wield a considerable amount of power in the region because of his lizardfolk followers. In the past he has used this influence to gain tribute and reverence, but it's possible that he will decide to do something about the growing human presence in Q'barra. Rhashaak, like many dragons his age, doesn't have much patience for expansionists or curious explorers.

The ***Eberron Campaign Setting*** hints at the presence of other guardians. Some say that a brood of blue dragons live on the cliffs of Adar, and that these powerful wyrms help those who seek refuge in the mountains. And then there is the Lair of the Keeper in the Demon Wastes. Stories say that the Keeper -- the lord of death and greed -- snatches souls on their way to Dolurrah. Certainly some deadly power lurks within this deep chasm, but many sages say that it is no god; rather, it is a dracolich, the remains of a dragon guardian infused with the power of Khyber.

A guardian dragon could lurk in any ruin or ancient site. Only bardic knowledge or ancient lore can provide a party with the tools to tell whether a dragon is a guardian that should be left to her post or a rogue wyrm that can be struck with impunity.

Rogue Wyrms

Not all dragons have an interest in the Prophecy or in fighting demons. Dragons are free-willed creatures, and they possess all of the myriad personality traits that can be found in humanity. While most are content to live in Argonnessen, a few reject the society of their own kind. Some simply wish to be alone, far from the watchful eyes of the dragon elders. Others may wish to pursue arcane experiments forbidden by the rulers of Argonnessen, or to enjoy pleasures that can be found only in human lands. Whatever their reasons, such dragons exist across Eberron. Here is the lone dragon the adventurers may seek -- the deadly creature lurking in its hidden lair, gathering a hoard in the darkness.

While the rogue wyrm may fill the image of the isolated dragon, remember the cunning and genius of dragons. A rogue wyrm not only has to worry about adventurers; it has to beware of the Chamber and other agents of Argonnessen. As long as the rogue dragon doesn't draw too much attention to itself or its activities, it is usually left alone.

Adventurers might stumble onto a rogue wyrm by accident; battling a thieves' guild, they could be taken by surprise when they discover the true power behind the organization. They could discover its hidden lair while searching for ruins. Or they could be sent after the beast, knowingly or not. Argonnessen disapproves of rogue wyrms -- and a party of adventurers could be the tool they use to eliminate an embarrassing fugitive.

A rogue wyrm is the best choice for a traditional draconic villain. No tears will be shed or demons unleashed if the creature is destroyed. But both DM and party should always consider the cunning of the dragon. Part of the creature's power is its intelligence, and a dragon rarely allows itself to be taken by surprise. Dragons are not simply monsters: They are the children of sky and earth -- the legacy of the first age of Eberron. An encounter with a dragon -- rogue or not -- should always establish the power and majesty of these creatures, and it should always be a significant event.

Ten Draconic Encounters

1. A group of NPC adventurers finds a green dragon egg in a nearby forest and return with it to the city. After

selling the egg, the adventurers are murdered one by one in grisly fashion. The sole survivor, a gnome rogue, hires the heroes to protect him as he tries to retrieve the cursed egg.

2. An elf among the party is visited by Cael Vendaelis, a distant relative. Cael is a warrior of the Silaes Tairn, a Tairnadal sect that has been fighting dragons since the elves left Xen'drik. Cael has discovered the location of a rogue blue dragon that slew one of the adventurer's ancestors -- and Silaes tradition demands that the character avenge this murder.

3. House Phiarlan's Carnival of Shadows has acquired a remarkable attraction -- a bronze wyrmling. The elders of Argonnessen will not allow the mother to take direct action against House Phiarlan, and she asks the party to rescue her child.

4. A patron and friend of the party summons the adventurers to an inn to discuss business. As the characters arrive, this patron is assassinated -- and his corpse expands to reveal his true form: that of a gold dragon. The party never knew his true nature, but now they must find out who killed him -- and if whether they themselves are in danger.

5. During the Age of Demons, the war against the fiends brought dragons to all corners of the globe. While exploring the dungeons under a ruined castle in Thrane, the heroes find a tribe of kobolds living inside a dragon's skeleton, led by a powerful kobold sorcerer.

6. The heroes are assigned to spy on a noblewoman, and their patron tells them that he thinks that she is a silver dragon in disguise. Although she is interested in acquiring some artifacts from Xen'drik and wears a silver dragon-shaped ring, the woman is indeed human -- although her intentions may be far from benign.

7. The heroes are hired by a Mror dwarf merchant to explore some ancient caves discovered after a recent earthquake. In one of the caves, they find a crystal prison containing a trapped demon, guarded by a pair of red dragon zombies.

8. While traveling through a manifest zone in Aerenal, the adventurers are caught in a bubble of slow time -- and suddenly they are in the midst of an all-out draconic assault on the island of the elves.

9. While exploring the Mournland, the adventurers encounter the warped remains of a Chamber observer. Once a red dragon, it is now a skeleton wreathed in an aura of living flame.

10. Long ago, a rogue gold dragon formed an alliance with a clan of Dhakaani hobgoblins. Now this Kech Draguus has emerged from hiding. With a corps of half-dragon goblinoids and a few full-blooded dragons at its disposal, the Kech Draguus are poised to reshape Darguun. Will the party act to counter this threat, or will they let the blood of dragons seize the throne of Darguun?

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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